

Ex-foes from Bay of Pigs gather

They share research, experiences from the notorious 1961 battle

Reuters News Service

HAVANA — Forty years after one of the most notorious battles of the Cold War, former foes from the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba came face-to-face Thursday for the first time to share experiences and research.

The U.S. delegation to the three-day conference titled "Giron: 40 Years After" included Cuban exiles who participated in the 2506 Brigade's doomed landing, ex-CIA agents who backed them, and then President John F. Kennedy's sister, nephew and some aides.

They began two days of ostensibly academic — but also emotionally and politically charged — sessions with their local counterparts, led by one of Cuba's senior commanders at the Bay of Pigs, José Ramon Fernandez, who is now a vice president in President Fidel Castro's government.

"This is not only a historical conference but a historic conference," said Peter Kornbluh, of the U.S. National Security Archive, who helped organize the American delegation.

"It brings us together in a dialogue that stands in great contrast to the bitter antagonism of the episode itself."



Historian Arthur Schlesinger, left, speaks with Cuban Vice President José Ramon Fernandez.

ism of the episode itself."

In a remarkable act of reconciliation, the delegations will revisit together Saturday the beaches, known in Cuba as Playa Giron and Playa Larga, where Castro's troops defeated the 1,500 invaders within 72 hours of the April 17, 1961, landing.

They may well be joined by Castro himself, who directed his troops from a tank and visited the front during the battle,

which was one of the most notable flashpoints in 42 years of U.S.-Cuba hostilities since his 1959 revolution.

Former Kennedy adviser and historian Arthur Schlesinger said he hoped the conference would "enrich and complete the historical record of this sad episode." He also noted the affinity sometimes felt by participants in a major historical event, even when they were antagonists.

3-12-01